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A DEVELOPMENTAL RESPONSE TO TRENDS OF OVER-DIAGNOSIS AND
OVERMEDICATION**

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NURTURING CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING:

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Abstract

Too many children today are being diagnosed with affective mood disorders and then medicated. Yet because the child's experience of self and world takes place in the medium of the family system, parents can learn how to mitigate childhood mood disorders by creating an environment based on child development principles that nurtures the child's well-being. As discussed by Erik Erikson and Francis Wicks, adults tend to project their own unresolved and unconscious emotions onto their children. This paper posits a developmental response to the diagnosis-treatment medical-model perspective that pervades modern-day psychiatry. Well-being flourishes in both child and adult when the adult understands child development principles, communicates with the child in developmentally appropriate ways, and creates environments that nurture the child's developmental imperatives. When those developmental imperatives are met, emotional problems can be prevented before they arise. When an adult who is motivated by care in relationship with a child can learn how to nurture the child's developmental needs—then it is likely that subsequent inter-subjective experiences may be affected positively.

The organization of the child's experience is a property of the child-caregiver system of mutual regulation. Moreover, recurring patterns of inter-subjective transaction within the developmental system result in the establishment of invariant principles [in the child] that unconsciously organize subsequent experiences.

—Robert D. Stolorow, Ph.D. (2009)

Introduction

Today, more children than ever are being diagnosed with affective disorders and then medicated. This article discusses alternatives to this model of diagnosis and medication. I propose that preventing emotional disorders in children requires focusing on nurturing the child's developmental imperatives thereby supporting psychological and emotional well-being. Because the child's experience of self and world are formed in the family system in relationship to primary caregivers, it is incumbent upon parents to create an environment based on child development principles designed to nurture the child's optimal well-being.

Communication gaps between parents and children may exist because many parents are unaware of their children's emotional needs and lack the skills necessary to interact effectively with them on an emotional level (Landreth, 2002). Without blame, parents can be re-educated to nurture their children's emotional development. My 26 years of fieldwork and research have revealed that deep involvement with the children in our lives can break open the parents' hearts to greater well-being and self-awareness. In other words, not only do the child's needs get met, but the parent can also heal childhood wounds and so be more available to create a developmentally appropriate nurturing environment. Thus, children's developmental imperatives are met and emotional problems are prevented in the child before they arise. Well-being

flourishes in both child and adult when the adult understands child development and communicates with the child in developmentally appropriate ways.

Affective Disorders and children

Affective disorders can appear in adults and children alike as a state of unhappiness or feelings of hopelessness accompanied by a host of symptoms. Weissman and Klerman (1992) argued that notions about the age and onset of depression have changed over the years. We now recognize that depression and mood disorders can occur before puberty and that family relationships play a significant role in a child's emotional maladjustment.

Emotional disorders are often experienced in emotional terms (such as sadness, hopelessness, or guilt) or/and in somatic terms (e.g., complaints of nerves, headaches, tiredness, feeling heartbroken, etc.). Symptoms of affective disorders that commonly appear in children include social withdrawal and disruptive behavior (APA, 2000, pp. 353-354). Some known causes named in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fourth edition* (DSM-IV-TR) can include but are not limited to:

- Abuse—emotional or physical
- Unresolved personal conflict with family members
- Problems such as social isolation
- Prolonged unresolved sadness
- Feelings of guilt
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Loss of self-esteem
- Despair and/or hopelessness
- Feeling powerless, small, or insignificant
- Feelings of helplessness and/or hopelessness

McClure, Kubiszyn, and Kaslow (2002) argued that clinicians today are facing great difficulties in appropriately assisting children with mood disorders. Ironically, parents may even challenge treatment based on faulty information obtained from unregulated sources (e.g., TV, internet, etc.) Moreover, the DSM-IV criteria fail to take developmental factors into account (Kaslow, Croft, & Hatcher, 1999).

Unresolved emotional pain

For many individuals, early life experiences have left them shaken and suffering from emotional pain. Sometimes emotional isolation can occur to preserve a sense of self in fear of being hurt by others (Laing, 1969). Symptoms of stress can begin to appear as a result of unresolved emotional pain such as disturbances in sleep patterns, difficulty concentrating, irritability, negative self-talk, etc. The individual is left asking himself, *Am I good enough?* Tragically, the child who is suffering from unresolved emotional pain may also feel guilt or shame as well for letting others down (DeRivera, 1984). Melancholy and other emotional mood disorders can appear with features such as loss of pleasure in activities or lack of interest in usually pleasurable events.

Parents often arrive in my office motivated by the knowledge that something is *off* in themselves or in their child but have no way to address it. Most parents know that what they are doing isn't working and want something better for both of the adults and for their child. An example is Molly who said, *I want certain things for my son, I just don't really know how to provide it. I am just reactive and I know I don't have the tools.*

Most adults begin the process of change with an internal question, or feelings that something is wrong, leading to the initial action to learn something new and find a new way of being with their child. Some parents talk about grappling with inner doubts as their relationships with their child showed signs of strain. Other parents notice an internal conflict when they observed themselves parenting as they had been parented even though they had told themselves they would never do that. A few are motivated by love for the child. In an atmosphere of safety and trust, parents can engage new learning.

Parental Projection

The shaping of human lives occurs in the primary relationship between child and parent. Renowned developmental psychologist Erik Erikson (1963) argued that as the child is parented, so he or she will parent. For example, regulation of emotions learned during the internalization of primary childhood figures will affect the integration that is possible as an adult. Erikson's model of development clearly explained the correlation patterns between the development of trust in the adult's early life (i.e., childhood) and the later capacity for empathy with that adult's child (Labouvie-Vief, 1998). In other words, development of trust in the adult's childhood affects the adult's ability to integrate emotions and to feel an empathic relationship to others (and the child) during the adult years.

Parental projection occurs when adults give insufficient attention to taking care of "their own emotional histories" (Paul, 1970, p. 343). As Erikson (1963) noted, lack of attention to the emotional past results in fear of conflict with the child. Fear impedes empathic connection with

the child and leads to parental concern about maintaining control. One result is adult imposition of reasoning or mature emotional evaluations on the child's feelings, fears, or anxieties (Paul, 1970). Parental projection of his or her own unresolved emotions involves self-absorption and self-interest and bypasses empathic understanding of the child's developmental needs. When developmental imperatives are not met, symptoms of imbalance, emotional pain, clinical depression, or other affective disorders appear in the child.

Many argue that although empirical evidence has recently validated clinical depression in children as young as age 3, few data are available to guide treatment of early childhood depression (Luby, 2009). Medication has been used to alleviate symptoms of mood disorders since the 1960s, yet we know that these medications have potentially severe side-effects (Varley & McClellan, 1998). Moreover, in the absence of data on the safety and efficacy of antidepressants in school age and pre-school age children, these agents are not recommended (Luby, 2009). Drawing from expanding knowledge of child development, Kaslow, Croft, and Hatcher (1999) maintain that the best clinical practices must involve parents, families, and systems...and must be sensitive to developmental, cultural, relational, and nosological issues.

Nurturing healthy feeling development in the child requires new learning for adults. Katherine captured the sentiments of many parents who come to me when she expressed that something more was needed to take care of her son's feelings as she said, *...our 9 year old son was exploding in his feeling relationships with others and we didn't know how to connect with him. We [she and her husband] couldn't do it ...* Another mother, Jess, spoke of having a

realization of ...*wow, I'm walking around with some real severe deficiencies here that are playing out with my kids.*

Another parent spoke similarly and noticed difficulties that stemmed from her own childhood. She said,

Where I was parented well as a child, it was easier to nurture my children in that area; but where my own childhood parenting [was lacking], I had a more difficult time. That correlation is very interesting for me to see.

Relationship with the Child

It is well established that the relationship with attuned caregivers determines the behavioral and mental health of children. Attunement is when one person (such as a parent) focuses attention on the internal world of another (such as a child) (Siegel, 2007). As we know, the child's healthy development takes place in the medium of the parent's attuned responses (Kaslow, Croft, & Hatcher, 1999). Mal-attunement from the parent can create emotional conflict in the child. Affect states that are not allowed to fully come into being due to a parent's mal-attunement can result in developmental-missing in the child (Stolorow, 2009).

Two giants in the field of understanding children have provided far reaching insights fundamental to supporting the well-being of children: Michael Polanyi and Francis Wikes. The philosopher Polanyi (1966) examined the nature of thought and discussed a way of knowing that comes from our awareness of things that occurs prior to the use of words. Tacit knowledge is a type of knowing that is learned from being in a situation and not necessarily from what is said about it. In tacit knowing, we can come to know aspects of a thing or situation beyond what we

are able to describe. For example, as we step back to take in the beauty of a work of art, we can have tacit knowledge of the object that we may not be able to verbalize.

Children often acquire tacit knowledge of a parent or family situation that they are not developmentally capable of translating into words. This awareness can live under the surface (in the unconscious) until such time as the necessary capacities develop enabling the details to be consciously known and expressed by the child. The subtleties of attitude, gestures, postures, facial expressions, feelings, and nonverbal communications as well as the more obvious behaviors and words are known by the child before they can be expressed. Attention placed on the feelings and intentions behind the words and behaviors are often more influential than the words and behaviors themselves in tacit knowing.

Wickes (1927) was a source of Jung's understanding of children and contributed significantly to his theoretical and clinical work. In the discussion about parental influence on children, Wickes (1988) wrote that the behavior of children is powerfully affected by the both conscious and unresolved unconscious emotions of parents:

Children are so deeply involved in the psychological attitude of their parents... the essential fact behind all this is that the things which have the most powerful effect upon children do not come from the conscious state of the parents but from their unconscious...for the ethically minded person who may be a father or mother this presents an almost frightening problem...one is afflicted with a feeling of extreme moral uncertainty when one takes these unconscious processes with the seriousness they deserve (p. xix).

Wickes went on to say that it is not a matter of observing conventional morals or values but rather the actual lived life of the parents that is primarily influential.

It is their duty as parents to...do everything in their power not to lead a life that could harm the children...Generally, far too little stress is laid upon how

important the conduct of the parents is for the child, because it is not words that count, but deeds. ...Parental influence only becomes a moral problem in the face of conditions which might have been changed by the parents, but were not (Wickes, 1988, pp. xx-xxi).

What is required to learn and change old ways of parenting and relationships with children? Individual choice coupled with planned action to learn something new and practice it leads to positive adult development. We know that adult change involves a re-evaluation of priorities and then a rearrangement of those priorities (Brandtstädter & Lerner, 1999). The clients (mentioned previously) were exposed to new information about nurturing children's developmental needs, took the time to understand it, then explored and experimented at home with my encouragement and corrections when needed. Their practical experiences helped solidify a re-prioritizing and commitment to practice child development in the family context.

A Developmentally Appropriate Response

Erikson asserted that it is incumbent upon the adult to address and solve unresolved childhood issues. He maintained that the parent must give sufficient attention to resolving conflicts from his or her own childhood for the sake of the child's development. He said, "Children must eventually train [parent] their own children, and any impoverishment... must be considered a possible liability affecting more than one lifetime. Generations will depend on the ability of every procreating individual to face his children with the feeling that he was able to save some vital enthusiasm from the conflicts of his childhood" (p. 311). An example of this can be seen in Benedek's (1970) work on transactional processes between adult and child.

Benedek (1959, 1970) examined processes that occur within the family context and found changes of subject/object relations in the parent. She maintained that parents who caringly respond to the child's development will often recall events from their own childhood. Her psychodynamic model of interaction between parent and child predicted that adults will recall repressed developmental experiences and often gain insight and change. In this view, emotional investment in the child stimulates reciprocal intrapsychic processes in the parent, which "account[s] for developmental changes in their [the parents'] personalities" (1970, p. 124). Benedek argued that "the reworking of the childhood conflicts leads to resolving them" in the parent (1970, p. 131). In alignment with Erikson's statement, Benedek's work showed how connection with the child stimulates development and maturation in the parent. Thus, parenthood is an opportunity for continuing adult development and for redressing out-of-balance situations with the child. This is supported by my work with adults who use child development principles in daily life with their children.

Everyone accepts that the parent influences the child, but few realize how much the child changes the adult. Being in relationship with the child's developmental markers often brings a parent face to face with understanding his or her own unresolved childhood issues. My research has shown that as the child develops, the adult must change to accommodate the child's increasing complexity (Luvmour, 2008). Because meaning is formed in relationships within the family system and in individual interactions within that system, sustained effort in conscientious relationship to the child allows the parent or caregiver to access greater trust, to engage in the process of self-inquiry, and to make new meaning throughout life in relationship to the context of

his or her world. Caring for the child's developmental markers promotes optimal well-being in the child while simultaneously benefitting the parent's adult development of well-being and wisdom (Luvmour, 2008).

As Katherine progressed in her development with her son she said,

..,we [she and her husband] went to seek help because we wanted to know how to stay connected with [our son] through this time in his life. I got a sense of connection that came directly from that learning experience; that connection in my family nurtured my sense of well-being.

...I nurtured my son's development of healthy feelings and watched myself in relation to that ... That was very helpful to my self-knowledge ... I learned how to stand in the presence of someone else's anger and witness it, and not have to ask them to suppress it for my comfort.

Erikson also argued that adult development is a movement motivated by care "toward connection with others" (Hoare, 2002, p. 10). In his view, parenthood was one way of fulfilling that need. The implication from Erikson's remarks is that the parent's care for the child results in feelings of connection. Moreover, those feelings of connection that occur in relationships with children motivate change in the adult. Using a systems-oriented person-in-environment perspective, Stevens-Long and Macdonald (1993) maintained that parents who tolerate empathic connection with their children simultaneously develop cognitive generativity in themselves. According to the authors, "the ability to sustain, tolerate, and continue to work productively in the presence of conflict...[is a] key to developing cognitive generativity and ultimately to the process of social change" (p. 102). All this indicates that in some cases it is possible for the adult to revisit unfulfilled or frozen childhood developmental needs and develop further to new levels of maturation. Moreover, the literature on parent development postulates that the

experience of parenting leads to higher stages of development and specifically fosters cognitive and psychosocial development in adults (Demick, 2002).

Mackenzie was a good example of nurturing her children's development in a way that she was never nurtured as a child. She said, "I have recalled many things from my own childhood." She went on to describe some realizations about her family of origin that she gained from using self-inquiry and said, "I've seen the incredible dysfunction that contributed to creating a type of goodness in us that wanted to excel." Mackenzie discovered that her family's standards of being an excellent citizen that she was raised with were very damaging to her. She explained that "an excellent citizen rises above her pain, is stoic, digs deep, and does what needs to be done. That was pounded into me." At times, Mackenzie discovered she was still grappling with a critical voice of her internal parent. When asked if her own developmental needs were nurtured as a child, she said, she knew that her developmental imperatives were definitely not nurtured. She said, "In fact, sometimes I meet my children's needs in places where I would have wanted to have been met." Mackenzie's reported working continuously to nurture herself now in ways she never got as a child. She said, "[Nurturing] my children has taught me to take better care of myself ... I rest a lot more now than I ever have in my life. I just take care of myself more."

The Necessity for Parent Education in Child Development Principles

Support for the child's emotional well-being must involve re-education of each parent to the child's developmental needs. Echoing Kaslow, Croft, and Hatcher (1999) best clinical

practices must involve the child's parents and family. Medication alone will not teach how to have better emotional relations at home or in school nor help the child create satisfying social relationships. Moreover, helping parents learn appropriate responses to the child's emotional development and needs can bring about positive development in the adult.

Research in the literature shows that parents are responsive to educational intervention efforts (Luvmour, 2008; Sandy, 1983; Thomas, 1996). For example, Sandy (1983) revealed that parent education in child development practices led to a significant increase in parental awareness. By learning to nurture the child's developmental processes, parents can be in a better position to care for their own children's developmental needs in a healthy way. Echoing Erikson, Sandy contended that parent education about the child's development promotes the development of trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, and healthy identity formation in the child. Moreover, parental knowledge promoted flexibility, change, and growth in the adults. According to Sandy, "It is every child's right to have a parent who has reached the level of parental awareness of which he or she is capable" (p. 108). As Karen said,

Overall, I think paying attention to [my son's] development has motivated me profoundly to be as clear as I can be inside. If there are blind spots—and by blind spots I mean areas that I contract around and I don't want to look at—I'm much more motivated to make myself look at my contracted places so it doesn't get in the way of [my son].

Children are always telling us what is happening for them and what they need through their actions, behaviors, and ability to use language. It is incumbent upon the adult to understand the child's developmental language and communication abilities. With the right developmental information, parents can address emotional pain in the child. It is well established through

research that the relationship with attuned caregivers determines the behavioral and mental health of children. The adult, parent, and professional *must* understand child development, reach into the child's worldview, and communicate with the child in developmentally appropriate ways (Luvmour & Loomis, 2009). Maria stated this well,

You know that nurturing my children's development absolutely affected my sense of well-being. Emotionally, physically, psychologically, I'm a much happier person, I'm a much stronger person, I'm a more honest person. I think I'm a person with more texture and substance. I'm more solid, really more here, and also I don't have ulcers anymore.

Development of Well-Being in Children

The events in childhood profoundly affect the decision making of adults. Nurturing well-being during childhood is the leverage point. In order to encourage full potential and well-being in children, it is necessary for adult caregivers to value and understand the developmental stages of childhood. Twenty-five years of work in the field of human development has demonstrated to me that the development of optimal well-being requires good communication, care for developmental imperatives, and environments that support the child's developmental capacities.

Healthy development requires different psychological and emotional nurturing at different ages. Capacities are innate and come to fruition in relationship with primary caregivers. Once identified, the child's developmental needs (physical, emotional, and psychosocial) can be understood and are relatively easy to support. By meeting these needs, unresolved emotional pain can be addressed and we can help children re-balance internal stress to become the healthiest possible versions of themselves that their genetics allow. As an example, eleven year old Tyrone came for an office visit with his father Seth. Although Tyrone was personable upon

entering the room, he was emotionally withdrawn and sullen. When his dad asked him to talk about what is bothering him he said, *why should I talk...no one really listens to me.* With empathy and a few simple questions the professional discovered that Tyrone was angry that his voice was never heard during his parents' divorce proceedings. He expressed how incredulous he felt about the *injustice* of the justice system. "*Why aren't kids really heard.*" When alone with the professional, Tyrone expressed that he knows that his mom lied to gain sole custody. To Tyrone, the justice system lacks heart. He described ways he is reeling about it, can't sleep thinking about it, and feels helpless and powerless. He said, "*There is no justice in the world. That's not the way it's supposed to be.*"

The Organizing Principle

There is an organizing principle at work in each stage of childhood that guides the young person toward well-being and actualization of his or her true nature (Jung, 1964; Maslow, 1971). The creators of the *Natural Learning Relationships* (NLR) approach to whole-child development (Appendix A: Table 1) furthered earlier understandings the organizing principle in human development. In the NLR view, the organizing principle is a life force that determines the general ways in which human energy, capacities, inclinations, and interaction are structured and the ways in which we act. The purpose and goal of each organizing principle is optimal well-being—and it determines the way in which the social, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual capacities are accessed by the child (Luvmour, 2006). Further, each organizing principle operates best in specific nurturing environments to bring forth optimal well-being. By recognizing what is

developing in his or her child, the parent has a way to understand and reflect on ways to supply child's developmental needs.

By helping Seth recognize that his son has a natural capacity for trust (that is organizing during these developmental years) Seth learned that hypocrisy and betrayal are intolerable. To access the innate capacity for trust, the imperative for healthy emotional relationships must be met. We began to help Seth to reflect on practical ways to provide appropriate developmental needs for trust to organize in his son (e.g., feeling mentors, trustworthy relationships, and adventure with inspiration). One of the first things Seth learned was how to feel into his son's feelings. Seth explained,

...oh, yeah, clearly I learned to feel my son ... he was in pain. I knew this for several reasons. I knew it because I could see it in his face and I also knew it because I felt that feeling when I was a child ... The way I knew it most clearly was remembering how it felt, and then looking at his [my son's] face, I could tell that he was feeling the same way.

As Tyrone began to feel his dad's emotional connection increase, he described himself as "...I'm not so alone...everything looks different." Seth later described learning how important it was for him to connect to his son's feelings and that the capacity to trust was organizing for both father and son.

We were working with Tyrone's feeling [development], then I started to connect with the feelings that I had.... I learned just how much I want that connection too. Also, at the same time I realized how my fear of being helpless keeps me from [connection] a lot of times.

Communication

Communication makes the social world in which the child's self-concept is created and his or her identity emerges (Pearce, 2007; Vangelisti, 2004). Nurturing optimal well-being by using developmentally appropriate communication depends on understanding what the child is capable of valuing—how the child sees the world (Luvmour, 2006). Effective communication is outlined in Appendix A: Table 1. What children value is most driven by the organizing principle and developmental changes that influence perception of the world and of self. The parent who learns to focus on developmentally appropriate communication will discover ways to be more effective. A professional can help the parent learn to focus on honest communication by discussing his own feelings in a developmentally appropriate manner with the child. Honesty and sincerity lays a foundation for the child to be open about his own feelings without fear of ridicule. Seth learned that however difficult this might seem, honesty with his son leads to greater connection, "...part of what I have contacted in myself is honesty. Honesty is helping me live with uncertainty."

The Environment

The environment of the child includes being-to-being relationships with primary adult caregivers. As Polanyi (1966) pointed out, so much is communicated tacitly in the environment that is beyond verbal communication. Being-to-being learning is acquired from actions (not from words) and builds the child's developmental competencies. The medium of this silent communication occurs between adult and child every day. It gives the child a safe and secure

base from which to explore. Included are the adult's nonverbal attitudes, gestures, and behaviors toward the child.

Any professional can discover important details about the child's home environment. For example, ask him/her about what feels fair in the family. After that, ask him/her to tell you about what is felt as unfair. Ask for everything that he/she can think of and listen carefully. Empathize without offering a different perspective. Ask what would be fair to do about any of these things.

Listen. Ask questions.

To help the parent reestablish well-being in his or her child, the professional can discuss reorganizing options to create a home environment that is more appropriate to the child's developmental needs. To help Seth reestablish well-being in his son, we discussed reorganizing the home environment to include inspirational opportunities that provide an opportunity for direct experiences of awe and wonder. Opportunities to feel inspiration help the child feel that he is part of something greater that reaches beyond current troubles. With this new information, the child can make new meaning in his world. Children between ages 9 and 12 yearn for inspirational environments and will take their most inspirational experiences as the far limit of what can be trusted. Fairness and justice, for instance, take on new meaning.

When professionals help parents learn basics about child development, age-appropriate communication, and developmentally appropriate environments, well-being flourishes in both parent and child. Seth said,

I've had to go past edges in myself and go into emotionally uncomfortable places of looking at myself and my motivation ... I think paying attention to my son's [developmental needs] has motivated me profoundly to be as clear as I can inside.

The table in Appendix A outlines four basic developmental stages with a quick review of what is organizing in each of the stages and developmentally appropriate communication styles.

As a result of his experiences of nurturing his child's developmental needs, Seth described becoming a more flexible person and more mature:

I am being more flexible, with my son, I am more open to change, I am not sweating the small stuff. I am not over-reacting about things as much, and I'm just letting things happen just as they happen ... this experience of learning and using child development has contributed to my maturity.

Summary

Our relationship with the children in our care, whether personal or professional, is of critical importance for the child's emotional health and psychological well-being. During each age of childhood connection, understanding, and appreciation of child development is required. Emotional pain and affective disorders in children can be resolved by caring adults who take the time to learn child development and then take action with the child to provide developmentally appropriate environments. Children learn competence in their developmental capacities in informal interactions with adults and in the family during everyday activities. To make those interactions the best they can be, it is important to understand how the child sees the world and nurture the child's developmental needs. Every aspect of a human being is continually adapting to relationships, interpersonal communication, and environmental experiences. With knowledge

of child development and appropriate communication, we can co-create relationships that match the child's developmental capacities and well-being will flourish.

Being in relationship with the child's developmental markers can often bring an adult face to face with unresolved childhood issues. As the child develops, the adult must learn and change to accommodate the child's increasing capacities and needs. Responses include reorganization of the environment as well as a developmentally appropriate relationship with the child. Practical applications of child development principles can prevent affective disorders in children that occur from unresolved emotional pain. When the child's developmental needs are met, access to developmental capacities is optimized, confidence builds, and the child knows his/her place in the family, community, and society. Well-being flourishes in both child and adult when the adult understands child development and communicates with the child in developmentally appropriate ways.

As Erikson pointed out, any adult who is motivated by care in relationship with a child can learn how to nurture the child's developmental needs—not just the biological parent (Luvmour, 2008). The implication is that anyone can learn child development principles and nurture the child's developmental needs. Moreover, if an adult is included in meaning-making about his or her parenting practices, he or she will be in a better position to resolve his or her own childhood issues, expand in self-knowledge, and be better able to nurture his or her child's needs. The benefits of right relationships with children nourish children, adults, families, and society as a whole.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1: Organizing Principles, Developmental Nourishments, and Effective Communication at Different Developmental Stages (Luvmour & Luvmour, 1993)

Characteristics of Each Stage	Natural Learning Relationships Developmental Chart			
	0 - 7	8 -12	13 -17	18 - 21
Ages				
Primary Organizing Principle	Rightful Place	Trust	Autonomy self-governance	Interconnectedness, humor, humility
Secondary Organizing Principle	Boundaries & strengths	Reciprocal cooperation	Identity construction personal power & freedom	Intentionality, incisiveness, relationship & systems creation
Primary Nourishment to nurture Well-Being	Loving touch with an attitude of acceptance	Feeling mentors who are honest and fair	Sensitive respect for the teen’s identity explorations	Mature recognition of commitment, equality, achievement
Effective Mode of Communication	Sensation exploration	Feeling engagement	Inquiry into ideals	Dialogue into meaning

Background of the Developmental Science of *Natural Learning Relationships*

The developmental science of Natural Learning Relationships (NLR) is whole-child appreciation of child development with practical applications focusing on optimal well-being. This theoretical contribution by Geoffrey Luvmour, MA and Josette Luvmour, PhD began in 1993 with their first book: *Natural Learning Rhythms: How and when children learn*. This work is both a synthesis and extension of the works of developmental psychologists (e.g., Piaget, Erikson, Mahler, Rogers, Dewey, etc.). A key theoretical approach underlying NLR is the emergent developmental contextual view (as described by Learner (2002) that humans are dynamic systems with a biological unfolding in a constant feedback loop with the environment. In this view, a developmental stage is defined by the way a child organizes the world in each

stage of life in relationship to context using all faculties and their interrelationship: cognitive, emotional, spiritual, and self-perception. Thus, knowledge is emergent.

Themes that carry through from Erikson's work to Natural Learning Relationships are the focus on well-being as well as the development of belonging, trust, autonomy, initiative, and life-span development in the adult. Moreover, Erikson was the first developmentalist to argue that as the child is parented, so he or she will parent—i.e., an adult's childhood experiences are internalized and play out in parenting practices. Natural Learning Relationships expanded Erikson's theory with the understanding of the *dance of mutual development* between adult and child. Central to NLR is the view that unresolved childhood issues in the parent can be resolved and integrated in the context of parenting. Erikson's writings showed that wisdom is part of adult development. In NLR, with the resolution of childhood issues, adults develop innate capacities of well-being and more loving relationships. What is more, wisdom emerges when adults take action to nurture the child's developmental needs.

In today's world, theories translated into practice are most useful if they address issues and problems of the day. The developmental theory of Natural Learning Relationships is intended to be practical and to enhance the life of all those who are in daily relationships with children (parent or professional).